

# United States Department of the Interior

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## *ANDERSON WEST LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PROJECT*

### **DECISION RECORD / RATIONALE / FONSI** (August 2003)

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The BLM's interdisciplinary planning team has designed the Anderson West Landscape Management Project based on current resource conditions in the project area and to meet the objectives and direction of the Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Northwest Forest Plan. The proposals presented and evaluated in the Anderson West Landscape Management Project's Environmental Assessment (EA) reflect what the planning team believe to be the best balance of resource conditions, resource potential and the competing management objectives.

#### **II. BACKGROUND**

Planning work for this project began in April 2000 and was largely completed in the summer of 2002 prior to the Biscuit Fire. Completion of the environmental assessment was delayed to allow the BLM's interdisciplinary team to review the proposals and potential impacts in light of the post-Biscuit Fire conditions.

From the onset, the scope of the project was intended to include a comprehensive evaluation of conditions on BLM lands in the project area, to address the full range of conditions and opportunities that were found, and to design a multi-faceted project that addressed the range of resources. The result is a project that includes a broad suite of recreation work, road work that corrects problems and provides for a range of resource management needs, wildlife habitat restoration, forest stand restoration, and resource and property protection work through fuel reductions. It provides commercial and non-commercial outputs as directed by the Bureau's strategic plan and the Medford District's Resource Management Plan.

The public involvement has been extensive and used a variety of approaches including letters, a community meeting, tours of the project area with interested neighbors, and extensive conversations and discussions with groups and individual residents of the Lower Deer Creek area. From this involvement it is abundantly clear that the range of views and preferences about resource management on BLM lands in the project area and the Deer Creek Watershed is very broad. There does, however, appear to be broad consensus in several areas: a) there is a

widespread recognition that the potential for severe wildfire is high, as are the potential consequences; b) there is a widespread desire based on community safety concerns that the fire hazard be addressed (*i.e.*, reduced) in a substantive way; c) there is a widespread desire to frame BLM's public land management activities in a way that will promote forest ecosystem restoration, although there is clearly a diversity of views about what this means, what it might include or what is permissible within the scope of "restoration"; d) there is concern about the potential environmental effects of this project in addition to the effects of the Biscuit Fire which burned a small area of the Lower Deer Creek Watershed north of Deer Creek and west of Squaw Creek and e) there is a widespread desire that public land management activities provide local residents opportunities for making a livelihood from the management activities that occur on the public land.

The BLM's interdisciplinary planning team has designed the Anderson West project in a manner that strives to be sensitive to the range of views and values, to the resource management mandates that are set forth in the various applicable laws and resource management plans, and to the current resource conditions in the project area. In designing and presenting it as an integrated and multi-faceted plan, the planning team has created what it believes to be the best balance of these factors and objectives.

Based on the extensive public input, recommendations from the planning team, and careful consideration of the objectives of the laws, regulations, and planning documents and NEPA analysis governing these lands, the following constitutes my decision.

### **III. DECISION and DECISION RATIONALE**

#### **A. Alternative 1**

Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative, is rejected because it does not meet the resource management objectives identified in the Medford District Resource Management Plan. It would not address or alter many of the existing resource conditions and trends that are of major concern relative to healthy forest conditions and resource protection. The No Action alternative would perpetuate or promote undesirable resource conditions. With the No Action, these conditions would not be improved or mitigated; certain undesirable ecological trends would continue unchanged and, in some cases, would be exacerbated with the passage of time. For example, high fire hazard conditions would continue and grow, stand vigor and forest health would continue to decline, and existing erosion problems would continue uncorrected.

#### **B. Alternatives 2 and 3**

It is my decision to implement the actions proposed in the Anderson West Landscape Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA #2003-17, May 2003) as outlined below. To facilitate presenting and understanding the different elements of this decision, this decision record addresses the proposal sequentially in the order they are discussed in the EA.

#### **1. Recreation Trail Management (EA, p. 4)**

*Decision:* My decision is to implement the proposed trail rerouting / maintenance work as proposed for the informal trail in Sections 3 and 4. In addition, the BLM will explore the potential of collaboratively developing a hiking trail or an interpretive trail with the local groups that are advocating protection and promotion of the trail. Pursuing this will be contingent upon obtaining full legal access for the general public on Valley Heights Road. This road provides the best access to the trail but it is not a public road. As a private road, the public does not currently have full legal access rights to use it.

This decision does not preclude implementation of the forest management activities proposed in Sections 3 and 4, including the areas immediately adjacent to the trail, subject to constraints applicable to the riparian reserves and special status / S&M species buffer area. The decisions regarding these activities are addressed below and include an adjustment to the silvicultural prescription adjacent to portions of the trail.

*Rationale:* The Medford District RMP does not identify this trail as a formal trail warranting special management focus. The Anderson West project plan was initially predicated on providing minimal levels of protection to the trail so as not to hinder its informal use. However, recent public comment letters indicated a strong local affinity for the trail (referred to by some as the Lone Pine Prospect Trail) that was not identified early in the planning process. The large number of comments which mentioned the trail suggests that there is a higher level of trail use in recent months than the project scoping comments had indicated or that appeared to be the case based on use indicators on the ground. Some letters of comment advocated extensive protection, to include the full section, because the trail is, or could be, a key piece in a developing ecotourism in the Illinois Valley. Although the trail is actually quite short and unlikely to become a “destination”, it does offer views of a variety of forest types and would provide viewing and interpretations of a variety of active and passive management conditions.

Linking development of a formal trail to first obtaining guaranteed public access to the trailhead is based on the goal of preventing future conflicts between trail users and local residents which could occur if trail use is encouraged through development and promotion.

Deferring the proposed forest stand thinning, fuel reduction work and habitat restoration work in the Section 3 and along the trail is not selected because of the forest stand conditions in the section. Not treating these stands will only exacerbate the declining vigor that is occurring due to very high stand densities. Implementing a lighter thinning prescription in some areas adjacent to the trail (See 5. below) will provide some of the trailside protection sought by some citizens while addressing to some degree the stand density / forest health conditions and the land allocation objectives in that portion of the project area.

## **2. Riparian Reserve Treatments (EA, p. 5)**

*Decision:* Vegetation treatments within the riparian reserves would be implemented as proposed, except in the southern half of Section 3 (see below). As such treatments will be limited to thinning, brushing, and slashbusting of understory vegetation where the treatments will promote the stated objectives. This could include the no treatment areas adjacent to streams and thinning

of understory trees up to 8"DBH between the no treatment zone and 75' from the stream, and up to 12" DBH in the remainder of the reserve area. The indicated down wood retention standards would be implemented as proposed.

The restricted use of skid trails and post-use decommissioning will occur as proposed. Only unrecovered skid trails may be used as designated skid trails. "Unrecovered" refers to skid trails with stunted vegetation or lack of vegetation due to soil compaction. No existing skid trail with trees of 8" DBH or greater will be considered "unrecovered".

Within the riparian reserves of the intermittent and perennial streams in the southern half of Section 3, vegetation treatments would be limited to thinning and brushing for fuel hazard reduction objectives only. Where this is implemented, all trees greater than 6" would be reserved from cutting. No Special Forest Products (e.g., poles) would be removed from these reserves. Vegetation treatment work within these reserves would be done by hand. Slash would be handpiled and burned. No treatment would be completed within the full riparian reserve width around the identified spring used as a domestic water source.

Areas of active soil movement will be treated as riparian reserves, per the Medford District RMP and the Northwest Forest Plan guidelines. Limited vegetation treatments will be permitted within these reserves as proposed in the EA.

Slash disposal, including burning, will be implemented as proposed.

Slash busters will be permitted as proposed and in accordance with the relevant project design features (see below).

Several comment letters raised the concern that the domestic water sources might not be adequately buffered and that there could be a decline in water quality or quantity if this were the case. To better insure that this does not occur, a BLM soil scientist and/or hydrologist will review all identified domestic water sources with valid state water rights and BLM rights-of-way within the project area to insure that, in their best professional judgment, the source is adequately buffered to insure water quality protection.

*Rationale:* Forest stand densities found in some areas of the riparian reserves are much higher than are normal or sustainable. Thinning the vegetation will reduce densities resulting in more vigorous conditions that will, in the long run, be advantageous in protecting the streams and aquatic systems. Leaving them unthinned will lead to increasing levels of tree mortality, increased fuel loadings and the potential for high intensity / high severity wildfires. The proposed treatment will also allow for the reintroduction of fire into the stands where / when it can be done with a low intensity burn.

The additional restriction of vegetation treatments within the riparian reserves in the south half of Section 3 is being provided in deference to the concerns of the domestic water users. The BLM's review of these water sources, the proposed buffers, and the proposed vegetation treatments has not indicated any basis for believing that the domestic water use will be adversely impacted. None the less, the proposed treatments are being scaled back to provide additional protection

while still addressing the fuel hazard conditions within the reserves. Implementation of S&M wildlife buffers in the south half of Section 3 will then provide some further expansion of the area of limited understory thinning / fuel treatments.

### **3. Special Forest Products (EA, p. 7)**

*Decision:* Provide for special forest products harvest opportunities as proposed. Special forest product gathering / harvesting will be pursued in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the overall stand treatment objectives. Scheduling of special forest product harvesting will be meshed with the other stand treatment work. If scheduling conflicts arise, in units that are not a part of the Anderson West advertised timber sale, special forest products harvesting will be given a priority for the first two years after the date when work on the project is free to commence.

*Rationale:* There is an ever increasing demand for a wide range of forest products for both personal and commercial use. Incorporating special forest product harvesting into the forest stand treatments will mesh providing products for this demand with the forest stand treatment / management objectives. In some instances, special forest product contracting may be the best strategy to accomplish stand management goals. Many units, for example, may require more than one treatment (e.g., thinning and density reduction) in order to reach the management goals for healthy stands). Providing these opportunities will contribute to the local economy and provide opportunities for jobs in the local community.

### **4. Young Stand / Forest Development Treatments (EA, p. 7)**

*Decision:* Implement the young stand treatments as proposed. After the young stand treatment is completed for a unit, a separate and unit specific fuel / fire hazard assessment will be conducted by an interdisciplinary team to evaluate the post treatment conditions and adjust the fuel treatment proposals to ensure that overall unit objectives are met. If changes are made, it is anticipated that they will be relatively minor in overall scope and will be within the scope of the types of manual fuel treatments described in the EA and the impacts considered in this assessment.

*Rationale:* Thinning and brushing in young stands will hasten the growth of desired trees and tree species to meet long term RMP determined forest product and habitat goals of both the matrix land allocation and within the selected areas of the riparian reserves where treatment is proposed. These stands are currently overstocked or have high levels of brush species competing with the forest tree species.

### **5. Vegetation Treatments in the older Seral Stages (EA, p. 8)**

*Decision:* The decision is to implement stand harvest treatments, including post harvest treatments, in older seral stage stands per Alternative 2 *except as noted below*.

The vegetation treatments will be modified as needed to be consistent with special status management guidelines (EA, p. 10).

*Rationale:* Alternative 2 is selected because it best implements the Medford District RMP and the Northwest Forest Plan. It will also meet the purpose of and needs for action and the objectives as outlined in the EA. In some areas (e.g., Section 3) it will provide greater flexibility in the stand thinning as it allows thinning across all canopy levels rather than restricting it to lower canopy levels which is the indirect result of meeting both the canopy retention objective and the stand / tree vigor objectives. This flexibility will better provide for adapting the thinning to address the highly variable conditions and fine scaled mosaic of conditions across any particular unit. Implementing this in a manner that will result in the most vigorous residual stand may mean that some dominant trees, including older dominant trees, are thinned. There will be trees greater than 24" DBH harvested in Section 3. However, the average diameter of trees in the Anderson West timber sale is 12.8" DBH and a majority (approximately 70%) of the volume is less than 20" DBH.

Additionally, the theme that guided the design of Alternative 3 was to place a greater emphasis on late-successional forest connectivity and thermal cover retention as compared to Alternative 2. With the implementation of the riparian reserve and special status and S&M species protection buffers the difference between the two alternatives narrowed. As proposed in the EA, Alternatives 2 and 3 treatments differed on 450 acres (gross). With the location and implementation of the buffers noted, this was reduced to approximately 255 acres (approximately 195 acres of no treatment or very limited vegetation treatment buffers in the units common to both alternatives).

Alternative 2 also produces a higher level of harvest volume to meet the timber production objectives of the RMP and BLM strategic plan than would be produced by Alternative 3. Thus both goals are met to a greater extent. The timber thinning / harvest portions of the Anderson West project are located in the matrix land allocation. One of the primary objectives of this land allocation (NFP and RMP) is the production of a scheduled supply of timber.

*Decision:* In two areas of Section 3 (along the trail and in the northeast part of the section between riparian reserves), the Alternative 2 prescription will be modified to retain higher canopy density than described in the Alternative 2 prescription.

*Rationale:* This will allow for the maintenance of the connectivity function of the forest stands in the Section while addressing the existing high stand densities. If not addressed, the high densities will lead to escalating mortality, increased fuel hazard, and a decline of the connectivity function of these stands. By addressing the declining tree and stand vigor, the options for future management will be much broader. Also, by maintaining a higher canopy closure on the local landscape, cumulative effects to late-successional forest habitat conditions will be minimized when the Anderson West project is completed.

This will also reduce the thinning intensity along portions of the trail in Section 3. It is acknowledged that some members of the public are strongly opposed to any thinning in Section 3 and particularly adjacent to the trail. The decision reflects a compromise between a) the land allocation objectives for that parcel and the forest health concerns and b) concerns expressed by interested citizens.

*Decision:* The post harvest treatments (EA, p. 10) will be implemented as proposed for all harvest units. As in the case in young stand treatments noted above, a post treatment interdisciplinary fuel hazard condition evaluation will be made after harvest work is completed. This is to insure that the proposed follow-up treatment is still optimum and required (see the qualifier on the fuel hazard reduction treatments below) in light of all of the stand treatment objectives. If appropriate, the fuel treatment proposals in the EA will be adjusted to insure up-to-date site specific post harvest treatments are implemented which are consistent with the overall stand objectives. It is anticipated that if treatment adjustments are needed, they will be relatively minor in overall scope and will be within the scope of the types of fuel and vegetation treatments described in the EA and within the scope of the impacts identified and considered in this assessment.

*Rationale:* These treatments will serve to make the forest stands more fire resistant than they are currently.

## **6. Fuel Hazard Reduction Treatments (EA, p. 11)**

*Decision:* The decision is to implement the proposed fuel hazard reduction treatments. All understory thinning will be integrated into the silvicultural stand treatment objectives for any given stand.

Slashbuster use would be limited to those areas identified in EA Table B-2. All identified project design features will be implemented (EA, p. 19, 20).

In Section 3, slash treatment within 150' of the trail would be limited to handpiling and burning. Broadcast / under burning would not be used for fuel hazard reduction within this 150' area.

As noted in the proposed action, all units that receive any type of vegetation treatment (*e.g.*, precommercial thinning, brushing, commercial thinning, harvesting, slashing, etc.) will be evaluated using the BLM's Fuel Hazard/Risk Assessment and Treatment Recommendations analysis process after treatment and prior to implementing fuel reduction treatments. This review will be conducted by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists. It is to insure that the appropriate fuel reduction treatments are applied to meet the fuel loadings and fire hazard reduction goals and other resource and safety goals. Based on this review and analysis, the proposed fuel reduction treatments may be modified, adjusted or dropped so as to better accomplish silvicultural objectives, resource protection objectives within the implementation considerations and opportunities. Substantial changes to the proposed treatments are not anticipated. Those changes that are made will be consistent with the descriptions, overall extent and impacts addressed in the EA and its range of fuel treatments alternatives. In some instances, for example, hand piling of slash and pile burning will be utilized when prescribed under burning is not feasible or where high surface fuel loadings exist and/or it is operationally impractical to implement because of significant risk to ecological processes, resource values, and private property and rural residences. Any changes that do occur will be within the scope of overall effects anticipated in the EA's analysis and it is not anticipated that any additional NEPA analysis / documentation will be necessary or undertaken as a part of these changes.

*Rationale:* Fuel hazard reduction treatments of both activity generated fuels and fuels in otherwise unmanaged stands are an important aspect of the project, particularly in areas in the rural interface. Reducing fuel loadings and altering fuel profiles will, in the event of a wildfire, make suppression efforts safer and more effective.

Restricting fuel reduction treatments to hand piling in areas adjacent to the trail in Section 3 will mitigate the visual impacts that some trail users might find offensive, as well as the potential for crown fires developing.

*Decision:* Prioritize fuel reduction to first treat in the defense zones adjacent to structures and then to treated areas in forest stands in section 3. All effort will be made to pile slash prior to the onset of the next fire season. Subsequent treatments (burning) will be completed as quickly as possible there after with the goal of having all work completed within 18 months, burn windows permitting.

*Rationale:* This prioritization is in response to public concern expressed about community safety during the Forestry Action Committee – BLM tour (July 16, 2003). There was a clearly stated concern about fuel hazard reduction treatment delays of up to 18 months. The BLM recognizes this concern as well as the burning constraints due to weather conditions, acceptable burning combustion from a resource perspective, personnel availability, and air quality requirements that are subject to state enforcement. These limitations result in narrow windows when fuel reduction (burning) can take place. Within the limitations given, the BLM will pursue fuel hazard reduction treatments as quickly as possible. Prompt slash piling, if that is needed, will serve to mitigate some of the fuel hazard before full treatment can be completed.

## **7. Wildlife Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Burning (EA, p. 14)**

*Decision:* The wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement prescribed burns will be implemented as proposed.

*Rationale:* This will improve wildlife habitat conditions and restore / maintain the vigor and diversity within these areas of chaparral, grassland and oak stand vegetation / habitat types. Some of the areas initially proposed for restoration burning were burned as a part of the Biscuit Fire.

## **8. Roads and Transportation Management (EA, p. 15)**

*Decision:* The decision is to implement the proposed road work to the extent necessary to support the Anderson West timber sale with the following changes:

- If Coral Road (a Josephine County Road) is used: a) trucks and heavy equipment that use this road as a part the Anderson West timber sale would be limited to a 5mph speed limit for the first ½ mile from Highway 199, b) dust oil or road surface watering for this first ½ mile will be included as a requirement of any timber sale contract, and c) Log hauling would be limited to between the hours of 6AM and 3PM. This will be coordinated with Josephine County.



*Rationale:* This roadwork is necessary to support the Anderson West timber sale and to correct existing road conditions that are contributing to sediment delivery to the streams. The special requirements on the use of Coral Road are directed at reducing the potential for adversely impacting the residents in this section of the road.

#### **9. Access (EA, p. 15)**

*Decision:* Access into W1/2NW1/4 of Section 35 has not been fully resolved at this time. As noted in the EA, however, if access is not obtained in time for the Anderson West timber sale, the thinning will be done using helicopters, or it will be deferred until access is obtained. Alternative access options will be pursued as needed to provide for other work (e.g. fuel hazard reduction work, wildlife habitat restoration work, young stand treatments) if the requisite Anderson West timber sale access is not obtained.

*Rationale:* Stand densities in the older seral stand portions of this area are high and need to be reduced to within the range of more natural conditions appropriate to the site.

#### **10. Grazing (EA, p. 15)**

*Decision:* The decision is to implement the grazing provisions for the allotment as described.

*Rationale:* The provisions will result in greater protection of the aquatic and ACEC values in the event that grazing is resumed on the allotment. This use is recognized in the RMP as a Section 15 lease under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, as amended.

#### **11. Project Design Features (EA, p. 15)**

The project design features described in the EA are to be treated as integral parts of the proposed action and are to be implemented, *except* as modified by or added to as noted below:

- a. Seed mixes for erosion control work (EA, p. 16) will be limited to a combination of native grasses, sterile wheat grass or annual or cereal ryes depending upon seed availability. These species are necessary for immediate erosion control because they germinate immediately, but do not persist. The native seed used will be from sources in Southwest Oregon/Northwest California to the greatest extent possible. Recognizing that the availability of appropriate seed from this geographic area may be limited, the geographic source may be broadened to include species native to the Pacific Northwest or the Intermountain region, if necessary.
- b. The seasonal operating constraints (EA, p. 18) restricting activities around known northern spotted owl nest sites will be March 1 to June 30 (changed from March 1 to June 15). This change is based on the mandatory project design criteria (PDC) included in the USFWS's October 12, 2001 Biological Opinion for FY02-03 timber sales.
- c. Under Slashbuster use (EA, p. 19), in areas where slashbusted material accumulates in

a 6" or greater bed depth over an approximate 200' x 200' area (increased from 100' x 100' stated in the EA), the material would be spread out and slash depths reduced to allow germination of young plants. This change is made to the ease of implementation while still meeting botanical goals

d. The Del Norte salamander site buffers (EA, p. 21) will be implemented to meet the requirements of the January 2001 *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines*, not the one site tree no-treatment buffer noted in the EA. Per the new guidelines, timber harvest is permitted within the site and surrounding buffer as long as a minimum of 40% canopy closure is maintained and harvest methods do not disrupt the surface talus layer. Potential harvest methods include helicopters or cable systems. (Note: Only one area of Del Norte habitat has been located. It is located within a RTV buffer.)

e. In units where a slashbuster is used, no mechanical treatment will take place within one site potential tree of the edge of the drip line of trees identified as being occupied by RTVs. Slash within the buffers will be treated by hand either by loping and scattering, by pulling slash back from these areas or by piling but not burning of any pile that has the potential to "smoke out" or "heat up" trees identified as occupied will be left unburned.

f. The following PDF is added: All cultural sites will be protected as required by the Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979. Protection measures to retain a site's integrity will consist of buffering and precluding treatments within the buffers.

## **12. Proposed Mitigating Measures**

The decision is to implement the proposed mitigating measures as follows

a. Proposed mitigating measure #1 (EA, p. 25): Accept. Delaying grazing after wildfire situations is common practice.

b. Proposed mitigating measure #2 (EA, p. 41): Reject. The BLM does not have access to this location. Ripping of the fireline is not thought to be critical due to the limited use of heavy equipment on the fire line and compaction should be low. The key concerns are the berms along the edge of the fireline which obstruct drainage and the need to seed the bare areas with native grasses. This could be adequately remedied using handtools.

c. Proposed mitigating measure #3 (EA, p. 50): Accept.

d. Proposed mitigating measure #4 (EA, p. 51): Accept. This has been commonly used in young stand development projects.

e. Proposed mitigating measure #5 (EA, p. 51): Reject. Protection of the buffers is important but can be accomplished without the proposed hand clearing around them. The objective of the measure will be met by adequately marking the buffers on the ground, providing contractors /

machine operators with good maps, and proactive contract administration.

### **13. Potential Monitoring** (Appendix E, p. 71)

1. Special status plant monitoring: Accept. This will help with future management related to special status plants.
2. Implement the following monitoring: To help determine post-slashbuster treatment decomposition rates and, more specifically, slashbuster treatment effects on soil productivity. Monitor soil in slashbusted areas in mature stand (35-002) where slashbusted material has accumulated over 2" inches thick Monitor for thickness, and composition of slashbusted material as indicators of rate of decomposition. Monitor annually for first 2 years after treatment (year 0, 1, 2) and then every other year for two more measurement periods (year 4 and 6).

### **14. OTHER**

It is recognized that additional changes from the EA have and will occur as a part of the continual refinement of the Anderson West project throughout the implementation of the project. Such changes and refinements are a normal part of the implementation of projects of this nature. These changes reflect the BLM's ongoing effort to reduce potentially adverse environmental impacts to levels below those anticipated in the initial assessment of proposed action while meeting the blend of objectives outlined in the EA. It also reflects the incorporation of and response to new information that arises during project implementation. For example, since the EA was prepared much refinement of the timber harvest / thinning acreage has occurred as a result of the on-the-ground implementation of the riparian reserves and Survey and Manage species buffers.

In that Port-Orford Cedar does not occur in the Anderson West project area and in light of the known locations of POC on private land in the vicinity of the project, the decision will not impact on Port-Orford Cedar or the potential spread of *Phytophthora lateralis* and no special mitigation measures are necessary.

### **B. BLM's Strategic Plan Context – Decision Rationale**

The Decision will implement a range of activities that will promote a number of the goals of the BLM's Strategic Plan for FY2000 to FY2005:

*- Goal 1.2: Provide opportunities for environmentally responsible commercial activities;*

*- 1.2.3: By FY2005, consistent with established health standards, annually offer for sale, on a decadal average, 211 million board feet of timber in western Oregon (Oregon and California Grant Lands).*

The Anderson West project's EA estimates that this decision will result in an estimated timber volume of up to 2 - 2.5 MMBF (based on the early EA estimate) being provided to the local

economy while thinning stands to create more vigorous and healthy stand conditions or to begin a stand regeneration process in conjunction with maintaining high levels of stand diversity.

*- Goal 1.4: Reduce threats to public health, safety and property.*

All of the areas to be thinned include fuel treatments to reduce the fuel hazard levels and in turn provide better protection of public property / resources. There are other areas where fuel and fire hazard reduction is a primary objective. Fire behavior and suppression difficulties experienced in recent fires in southwest Oregon (e.g., the Biscuit) clearly demonstrate the fuel hazard conditions in local forests and the need for proactive fuel hazard reduction work that will reduce threats to public health, safety and property. This is part of the Anderson West project's objectives.

*- 1.4.2: Assess the condition of BLM-maintained roads to identify public and administrative access needs, maintenance requirements to resolve public safety and environmental concerns, and prospective road closures.*

Preparation of the Anderson West project included road assessments of all of the roads in the project area. Maintenance and repair needs were identified. Roads were evaluated for closure opportunities. Road side brushing and pruning will be done as needed during maintenance work to enhance public safety. Approximately 2.0 miles of existing or temporary roads constructed under the project will be decommissioned upon the conclusion of their use.

*- Goal 2.2: Restore at-risk resources and maintain functioning systems*

*- 2.2.2: Achieve proper functioning condition or an upward trend on BLM-administered land.*

The Anderson West Project will result in an overall reduction in fuel loadings and stand densities moving them closer to historical levels and normal ranges. Roads will be repaired, maintained or decommissioned which will contribute to the attainment of the ACS objectives and toward maintaining properly functioning systems. The project will also restore and reinvigorate a variety of habitats (e.g., oak woodlands and chaparral). The project decision incorporates recommendations from the Rangeland Health Assessment. Should grazing resume in the future, changes will be made to continue meeting the Rangeland Health Standards and grazing guidelines.

### **C. National Fire Plan Context – Decision Rationale**

The National Fire Plan, a culmination of various reports, (*i.e.*, Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment, Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health), accompanying budget requests, Congressional direction, and resulting strategies, plans, projects, and other activities have set the stage and provided direction for an increased application and management of prescribed fire and various other fuel treatments on federally managed lands. This is further reinforced by the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy along with its accompanying

2001 review and update.

The eastern portions of the Anderson West project area encompass portions of the wildland/urban interface that fall into the Illinois Valley “Community at Risk” (under the National Fire Plan (Federal Register Vol. 66, No. 3). Consequently, special regional and national level attention is placed on this area as a wildland/urban interface community within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire. This emphasis extends 1½ miles beyond the Communities at Risk boundary.

Much of the project area has high risk fire regimes and is classified as fire condition classes two or three under the Department of the Interior’s “Cohesive Strategy.” The fire regimes in these fire condition classes have been moderately to significantly altered from their historical range of fire frequency. To restore them to their historical fire regimes, these lands require some level of restoration through mechanical and prescribed fire treatments (Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health, DOI, March 2001 Draft). The Anderson West project includes a range of management actions directed at this restoration and at reducing the high wildfire risk on Federal lands.

#### **IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Pursuant with the Endangered Species Act, consultation was completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The USFWS’s October 12, 2001 Biological Opinion (log # 1-7-01-F-032) addresses timber sale projects for FY02-03 including the Anderson West timber sale which will be based upon the current decision. The Service has stated its opinion that the proposed action would not jeopardize the continued existence of ESA listed species. The present decision regarding the Anderson West project’s timber sale is consistent with all of the mandatory terms and conditions identified in this biological opinion. It also incorporates and meets all of the identified recommended conservation measures.

In accordance with the ESA and the Magnusen- Steven’s Act, the BLM initiated informal consultation on the Anderson West project with NOAA – Fisheries on August 20, 2002. In their November 19, 2002 letter of concurrence, NOAA – Fisheries concurred with the BLM’s determination that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect the relevant species stating that “the proposed project is unlikely to cause incidental take of SONC coho salmon or cause adverse defects to designated critical habitat. “ In addition, they state that “conservation measures that the BLM included as a part of the proposed action to address ESA concerns are also adequate to avoid, minimize, or otherwise offset potential and adverse effects to designated essential fish habitat” and that consultation under the MSA was concluded.

The project will not adversely impact any sites of cultural or historical significance. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was informed of the BLM’s finding in accordance with 36 CFR 800.5(b).

The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz and of the Grande Ronde were notified of this project during the scoping and / or the EA’s public comment period. Josephine County Commissioners

and the Josephine County forestry department were also contacted. No responses were received.

## **V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public notification and involvement for the Anderson West Landscape Management Project was initiated in April 2000 with the mailing of a scoping notice to 118 individuals and organizations which had previously requested to be notified of such projects, Josephine County officials, native American Tribes, and landowners of record (county tax rolls) for private land adjacent to the project area. A notice announcing the scoping period was also published in the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Scoping responses were received from three organizations and one individual. Subsequent to this (in early 2003) scoping comment letters were received from an additional 2 organizations and 5 individuals.

All Public input received regarding the Anderson West project was carefully reviewed and considered. Many excellent comments were received regarding both the substance of the Anderson West project and the commenters' preferences about the Anderson West proposals and the management of the BLM administered land in the project area.

A formal public comment period for the Anderson West Landscape Management Project's EA was provided during May - June 2003. The public was notified of this via a newspaper notice and letters to 142 individuals, Tribes, organizations and government entities. Eighty-eight responding letters of comment were received (5 organizations and 83 individuals). Of those that had return addresses indicated, 36 were from outside of the Selma area.

Additional cards, letters and phone calls have been received from across the spectrum of opinions related to this project, pro and con, right up to the date of this decision. They have been carefully reviewed and considered as well.

The comments primarily focused on activities proposed in Section 3. A frequently expressed opinion was that there should be no management actions taken in Section 3. Comments also focused on the concept of maintaining healthy forests through preservation of "old growth" trees. Usually section 3 was referenced in this regard. In addition, the existing informal trail in section 3 was frequently mentioned in terms of its existing use for hiking and the trail's value as a basis for promoting ecotourism in the Illinois Valley because of its current largely "unmanaged" condition. Some comments advocated that all project management actions be based on promoting community safety as it pertains to the potential for high intensity wildfire.

While I greatly respect the expressed desire of some of the commenters for not implementing any of the Anderson West forest management project proposals in Section 3, I have decided that the forest conditions and the mandates of the BLM's RMP make a stronger case for proceeding with the decisions stated earlier in this Decision Record in Section 3. The treatments proposed will balance the competing objectives and meld them with a consideration of the current stand conditions in this area. They will maintain and improve the health of the forest in Section 3 by decreasing fire hazard through ladder and understory fuel reduction treatments and increasing health of large trees by thinning mostly smaller or less vigorous trees from the stand. There are

special accommodations provided for the trail. It also recognizes that treatments along much of the trail will not occur as it lies within a no-harvest Red Tree Vole buffer and that the thinning prescription has been adjusted so as to maintain at least 60% canopy closure. Not treating in this area at this time, will lead to an accelerating level of tree mortality with a consequent increase in fire hazard concerns and a consequent narrowing of future stand management options.

Some of the comments spoke of concerns about the potential impact of the proposed action in Section 3 on domestic water supplies / sources in Section 3. Each of these sites have been reviewed on the ground with the landowner to ensure that that detrimental impacts will not occur and to assist them in obtaining the requisite permissions to continue their use of these public land water sources.

A petition with 66 signatures and a follow-up letter was received during the public comment period. This petition requested the BLM to incorporate Deer Creek Valley Natural Resources Conservation Association's (DCVNRCA) fourteen "criteria for sustaining forest and community health" in its project plan and to only pursue those aspects of the Anderson West proposal that are consistent with these criteria. The follow-up letter highlighted the congruency between many aspects of the 14 criteria and parts of the NFP and RMP.

After carefully reviewing these criteria, a couple of conclusions are clear: 1) the fourteen criteria are mostly very general and conceptual and thus specifically how the petitioners thought they should be applied in the Anderson West project area given the existing resource conditions is largely unspecified; 2) the Anderson West project is consistent with many of the principles articulated in the fourteen criteria; and 3) there is a major conflict between part of criteria #4 and the mandates of the Northwest Forest plan and the RMP, plans that are the result of very extensive public involvement processes and which are the basis for the Anderson West project planning.

The NFP and RMP placed a large percentage of the Grants Pass Resource Area lands in reserve allocation and a very small part of the land in the matrix allocation. In the matrix land allocation it directs a scheduled commodity / timber output. In making these allocations it was recognized and accepted that some previously unentered stands in the matrix would not remain that way. The BLM is committed to forest product harvesting from these lands in accordance with the RMP. A portion of DCVNRCA's criteria #4 conflicts with this by stating that "un-entered forests must remain un-entered". Thus *any* management action in Section 3 of the Anderson West project will conflict with this position.

While I cannot support 'no action' in the project area, a lighter level of treatment in order to reduce the potential impacts to resources in Section 3 has been selected. I have chosen a course of management action that will balance commodity output, ecosystem health and recreational use consistent with the RMP. This course of action is anticipated to result in a viable, productive legacy for the future and one which has a broader range of options in the future for this portion of matrix land. I recognize that personal values do not always agree with the mandates and decisions of the BLM.

On July 16, 2003 BLM participated in a field tour and public meeting hosted and facilitated by

the Illinois Valley Forestry Action Committee. Comments verbally received on this day were generally the same as those received during the public comment period. There was a concern brought up during the field tour about high fire hazard level while accumulated slash lay on the ground prior to controlled burning. This situation could last as long as 18 months after vegetation treatment. Consideration of this comment resulted in the second decision noted above under #6, Fuel Hazard Reduction Treatments.

## **VI. CONCLUSION AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**

### **A. Plan Consistency**

Based on the information in the Anderson West Landscape Management Project's EA, in the record, and from the letters and comments received from the public about the project, I conclude that the decisions in this Decision Record are consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and, the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (January 2001). They are also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, The Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws and regulations. They are also consistent with Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).

This decision will not have any adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution (per Executive Order 13212).

### **B. Finding of No Significant Impact**

On the basis of the information contained in the environmental assessment and a consideration of the comments received from the public regarding the Anderson West Landscape Management Project, it is my determination that the decision stated above will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts and effects addressed by the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the Northwest Forest Plan, their EIS documents and their respective Records of Decision. Thus, the Anderson West project does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement (EIS) (or supplement to the existing EISs) is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This conclusion is based on my consideration of the CEQ's criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA and based on my understanding of the project. As noted above, the analysis of effects has been completed within the context of the Medford District's Resource Management Plan and it is consistent with that plan and the scope of effects anticipated from that plan. The analysis of effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of impacts.



I have considered the intensity of the impacts anticipated from this Anderson West decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested by the CEQ. With regard to each:

*1) Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.* The assessment has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts. None of the individual or cumulative effects have been identified as being significant. Impacts are within the scope of the EISs to which the project's EA is tiered.

*2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspects of the project have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. The fuel and fire hazard reduction elements of the project will have a beneficial impact on public health and safety, particularly within the rural interface / wildland urban interface areas.

*3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The Anderson West Landscape Management project area is adjacent to and includes a portion of the Eight Dollar Mountain ACEC. No adverse impacts on the ACEC values have been identified. A beneficial impact should result with the changes proposed for the grazing allotment that includes a part of the ACEC.

*4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* The effects of the Anderson West project are similar in nature to those of many other projects that are implemented within the scope of the Northwest Forest Plan and the Resource Management Plan. There is a continual full range of debate, findings and opinions about the potential effects of such land management activities as evidenced by the public comments received regarding the Anderson West project. It underscores a level of uncertainty that exists in assessing the changes that may occur as a result of all such projects. This uncertainty is acknowledged by the EISs to which the Anderson West EA is tiered. Neither the analysis nor the public comments identified any significant or unique levels of controversy specific to the effects of the project. Certainly there was a range of views expressed regarding the desirability of some elements of the project (e.g., commercial harvesting and road construction) and the desirability of some of the changes that would result (e.g., wildlife habitat changes).

*5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis does not show that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks

*6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* The action and the decision will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects. It is one of many similar projects designed to implement the RMP and NFP.

*7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No significant cumulative impacts have been identified. The project is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the RMP – EIS.

*8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or*

*eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* The project area does not include any listed National Historic Register sites or sites known to be eligible. Cultural sites in the project will be protected per the project design features noted above.

*9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* The project includes project design features that preclude adverse impacts on ESA listed species. ESA consultation with NOAA – Fisheries and USFWS has been completed with the determination that the project is not likely to adversely affect T&E species. As noted in the decision, some changes are made to the proposal to insure consistency with mandatory terms and conditions set forth by the regulatory agencies.

*10) Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.* There is no indication that this decision will result in actions that will threaten a violation.

## **VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES**

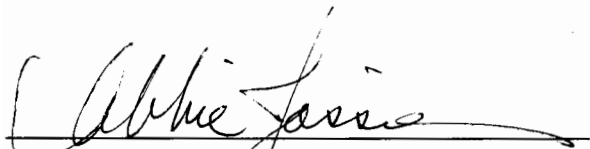
This decision is a forest management decision. Administrative remedies are available to persons who believe that they will be adversely affected by this Decision. Administrative recourse is available in accordance with BLM regulations and must follow the procedures and requirements described in 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulations 43 CFR § 5003.2(a&b), the effective date of the decision, as it relates to an advertised timber sale(s), will be when the first Notice of Sale for such a sale appears in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located. This newspaper is the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of the first notice of sale establishes the effective date of the decision for those portions of this decision record included in the timber sale and timber sale prospectus. The effective date of this decision establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in

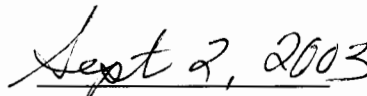
accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulation 43 CFR § 5003.2 (a&c), the effective date of this decision, as it pertains to actions which are not part of an advertised timber sale, will be the date of publication of the Notice of Decision and FONSI in The Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the date of publication in the Grants Pass Daily Courier will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

Any contest of this decision should state specifically which portion or element of the decision is being protested and cite the applicable CFR regulations.



Abbie Jossie  
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area  
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management



Date